

MINA DE VANGHEL WAS BORN IN THE country of philosophy and imagination, in Königsberg. Toward the end of the French campaign, in 1814, the Prussian general Count de Vanghel abruptly left the court and the army. One evening—this was in Craonne, in Champagne, after a murderous battle in which the troops under his orders had wrested a hard-pressed victory—a doubt assailed his mind: *has a people the right to change the innermost and rational manner by which another people seeks to arrange its material and moral existence?* Preoccupied by this great question, the general resolved not to draw his sword again before answering it; he withdrew to his Königsberg estates.

Closely observed by the Berlin police, Count de Vanghel concerned himself only with his philosophical meditations and with his only daughter, Mina. A few years later he died, still a young man, leaving his daughter a huge fortune, a weak mother, and official disgrace, which is no small thing in proud Germany. It is true that, as a lightning rod against this misfortune, Mina de Vanghel bore one of the noblest

names in eastern Germany. She was only sixteen; but already the sentiment she inspired in the young officers who constituted her father's society amounted to veneration and enthusiasm; how they loved the romantic and sombre character which occasionally sparkled in her glance!

A year passed; her mourning came to an end, but her grief over her father's death did not diminish. Madame de Vanghel's friends were beginning to murmur the terrible word *consumption*. Nonetheless, no sooner was this period of mourning past, than Mina was obliged to appear at the court of a sovereign prince to whom she had the honour of being distantly related. As she left for C——, the capital of the Grand Duke's estates, Madame de Vanghel, alarmed by her daughter's romantic ideas and her deep melancholy, hoped that a suitable marriage and perhaps a little love would restore her to the notions befitting her age.

"How I long," she said to her daughter, "to see you married in this country!"

"In this ungrateful country! in a country," her daughter answered mournfully, "where my father, for the price of his wounds and twenty years of dedication, met with nothing but the lowest form of police surveillance! No, I had rather change religion and die a nun in the depths of some Catholic convent!"

Mina knew court life only from the novels of her compatriot Auguste Lafontaine, whose scenes often describe the love affairs of a rich heiress exposed to the seductions of a young colonel, the king's aide-de-camp, a poor head and a good heart. Such an affair, born of money, horrified Mina.

"What is more vulgar and more commonplace," she said to her mother, "than the life of such a couple a year after marriage, when the husband, thanks to his marriage, has become a major-general and the wife a lady-in-waiting to

the hereditary princess! What becomes of their happiness if they should go bankrupt?"

The Grand Duke de C——, who had no idea of the obstacles the novels of Auguste Lafontaine were preparing for him, hoped to keep Mina's vast wealth at his court. Even more unfortunately, one of his aides-de-camp paid court to Mina, perhaps with *higher authorization*. Nothing more was required to determine her to flee Germany. The enterprise was easy enough.

"Mamma," she said to her mother one day, "I want to leave this country and live abroad."

"How you make me tremble when you speak that way! Your eyes remind me of your poor father," replied Madame de Vanghel. "Well, I shall take no sides, nor display my authority; but do not ask me to request the grand duke's ministers for permission to travel abroad."

Mina was extremely unhappy. The successes won by her huge, warm eyes and her distinguished expression rapidly diminished when the court learned that she entertained notions which opposed those of His Serene Highness. More than a year passed in this fashion; Mina despaired of obtaining the indispensable permission. She formed the plan of disguising herself as a man and proceeding to England, where she would live by selling her diamonds. Madame de Vanghel realized with a sort of terror that Mina was undertaking strange experiments to alter the color of her skin. Soon after, she discovered that Mina had ordered man's clothes for herself. Mina observed that on her rides she always encountered some officer of the grand duke; but with the German imagination she had inherited from her father, such difficulties, far from dissuading her from an undertaking, made it even more attractive.

Without realizing it, Mina had won the affection of the

Countess D——; this was the grand duke's mistress, a strange and romantic woman if ever there was one. One day, out riding with her, Mina encountered an officer who began following them at a distance. Vexed by this man, Mina confided her plans for escape to the countess. A few hours later, Madame de Vanghel received a letter written in the grand duke's own hand, granting her an absence of six months in order to take the waters at Bagnères. It was nine o'clock in the evening; by ten, these ladies were on their way, and fortunately by the next morning, before the grand duke's ministers were awake, they had passed the frontier.

It was early in the winter of 182— that Madame de Vanghel and her daughter arrived in Paris. Mina had many successes in the embassy balls. It was said that certain diplomats had orders to see to it, however discreetly, that a fortune of several millions did not become the prey of some French seducer. In Germany, it is still supposed that the young men of Paris are concerned with women.

For all these German imaginings, Mina, who was eighteen, was beginning to have flashes of good sense; she realized that she had failed to make friends with any Frenchwoman. Among all those she met, she encountered extreme politeness, and after six weeks' acquaintance, she was further from friendship than on the first day. In her affliction, Mina imagined that there was something coarse and disagreeable in her manners which paralyzed French urbanity. Never had so much real superiority been observed combined with such modesty. By a piquant contrast, the energy and brusqueness of her decisions were hidden beneath features which still possessed all the naïveté and all the charm of childhood, and this countenance was never spoiled by the more serious expression which heralds the

onset of reason. Reason, it is true, was never the decisive feature of her character.

For all the polite savagery of its inhabitants, Paris delighted Mina. In her own country, she had loathed being greeted in the streets and seeing her carriage recognized; at C——, she saw spies in all the ill-dressed persons who took off their hats to her; the incognito of this republic known as Paris charmed her singular character. In the absence of the warmth of that intimate society which Mina's excessively German heart still regretted, she saw that in Paris, every evening, one can find a ball or some other amusing spectacle to attend. She sought out the house in which her father had lived in 1814, and of which he had spoken so frequently. Once settled in this house, whose tenant she had managed to displace with the greatest of difficulty, Paris was no longer a foreign city to her; Mademoiselle de Vanghel recognized the smallest rooms of this dwelling.

Though his chest was covered with medals and crosses, Count de Vanghel had been, at heart, nothing but a philosopher, a dreamer like Descartes or Spinoza. Mina loved the obscure pursuits of German philosophy and the noble stoicism of Fichte, as a tender heart loves the memory of a splendid landscape. Kant's most unintelligible phrases merely reminded Mina of the sound of her father's voice as he uttered them. What philosophy would not be touching, and even intelligible, with such a recommendation! She managed to persuade several distinguished scholars to give lectures at her house, attended only by herself and her mother.

In the midst of this life—mornings with scholars and evenings at embassy balls—love never touched the rich heiress's heart. The French entertained but did not move her.

"I grant you," she would say to her mother, who praised them to her so often, "they are the most sociable people one

could meet. I adore their brilliant minds, and every day their delicate irony astonishes and amuses me; but do you not find them imitative and ridiculous whenever they attempt to seem moved? Is their emotion ever unaware of itself?"

"Now what is the use of such criticism?" answered the wise Madame de Vanghel. "If you don't enjoy France, let us return to Königsberg; but don't forget that you are nineteen years old, and that I shall not always be with you. It is time for you to think of finding a protector. If I were to die," she added with a melancholy smile, "the Grand Duke de C—— would marry you off to his aide-de-camp."

One fine summer day, Madame de Vanghel and her daughter had gone to Compiègne to watch the king's hunt. The ruins of Pierrefonds, which Mina suddenly happened upon in the depths of the forest, powerfully affected her. Still a slave of German prejudices, all the great monuments to be found in Paris, that *new Babylon*, seemed to her to have something *dry, ironic, and nasty* about them.

The ruins of Pierrefonds struck her as touching, like those of the old castles crowning the peaks of the Brocken. Mina persuaded her mother to make a few days' sojourn in the little inn of the village of Pierrefonds. The ladies were abominably lodged there. One day of rain followed the next. Mina, thoughtless as a twelve-year-old, stood under the porte-cochère of the inn, watching the rain fall. She caught sight of a notice-board advertising a property for sale in the vicinity. A quarter of an hour later she arrived at the notary's, guided by a girl from the inn who was holding an umbrella over her head. This notary was indeed astonished to find a young foreigner, so simply dressed, eager to discuss the price of an estate amounting to several hundred thousand francs, then asking him to sign an arrangement for a

deposit and to accept as payment several thousand-franc notes from the Bank of France.

By an accident I shall be careful not to qualify as extraordinary, Mina was cheated only a little. This estate was called Le Petit-Verberie. The seller was one Count de Ruppert, well known in all the chateaux of Picardy. He was a tall, extremely handsome young man; one might admire him at the first encounter, but only a few moments later one felt repelled by something hard and vulgar about him. Count de Ruppert soon claimed to be Madame de Vanghel's friend; he entertained her. Perhaps among the young blades of the period he was the only one who recalled those agreeable roués so fancifully described in the memoirs of Lauzun and Tilly. Monsieur de Ruppert had just dissipated a great fortune; he was imitating the mishaps of the nobles of the age of Louis XIV, and could not imagine how Paris could fail to be exclusively concerned with him. Disappointed in his notions of glory, he had become fanatical about money. An answer to his inquiries in Berlin brought his passion for Mademoiselle de Vanghel to its apogee.

Six months later, Mina was saying to her mother:

"One must really buy property to have friends. Perhaps we might lose a few thousand francs, if we wanted to get rid of Le Petit-Verberie on the instant: but at that price, we now can number a host of agreeable ladies among our intimate acquaintances."

Nonetheless Mina did not adopt the manners of a young Frenchwoman. While admiring their seductive graces, she preserved the naturalness and the freedom of her German ways. Madame de Cély, the most intimate of her new friends, said of Mina that she was *different*, but not singular: a charming grace won forgiveness *for everything*; her glance did not disclose that she possessed millions; she did

not have the *simplicity* of the best society, but a true seduction.

This tranquil life was altered by a thunderbolt: Mina lost her mother. As soon as her grief permitted her an occasion to realize her position, she found it excessively distressing. Madame de Cély had brought her to stay in her chateau.

"You must," this friend, a young woman of thirty, kept telling her, "you must return to Prussia, that is the wisest thing to do; otherwise, you must get yourself married here, as soon as your mourning is over, and meanwhile, you must send straightway to Königsberg for a lady-companion who, if at all possible, is a relative."

There was one great objection: German girls, even the richest ones, believe that one can marry only a man one adores. Madame de Cély enumerated at least ten likely matches; all these young men struck Mina as vulgar, cynical, almost disagreeable. Mina spent the most unhappy year of her life; her health suffered, and her beauty faded almost entirely. One day when she had come to visit Madame de Cély, she was told she would encounter at dinner the celebrated Madame de Larçay: this was the richest and most agreeable person in the countryside; she was often held up as a model for the elegance of her entertainments and the perfectly dignified, agreeable, yet entirely reasonable fashion in which she managed to dispose of a considerable fortune. Mina was astonished by everything she found common and prosaic in Madame de Larçay's character. "So that is what one must become here in order to be admired and loved!"

In her suffering—for the failure of the *beautiful* is a kind of suffering for German hearts—Mina stopped attending to Madame de Larçay and, for politeness's sake, made conversation with her husband, an extremely simple gentleman whose only recommendation was that he had been a page to

the Emperor Napoleon during the Russian retreat and had distinguished himself by a bravery beyond his years in that campaign and the subsequent ones. He spoke very eloquently and very simply of Greece, where he had managed to spend a year or two, fighting for Greek liberty. His conversation pleased Mina; he produced upon her the effect of an intimate friend whom she was seeing again after a long separation.

After dinner, the company visited several famous places in the forest of Compiègne. More than once it occurred to Mina to consult Monsieur de Larçay about the awkward nature of her position. The elegant airs of Count de Ruppert, who that day was following the barouches on his horse, contrasted vividly with Monsieur de Larçay's natural and even naïve manners. The great events among which he had begun his life, revealing to him the truth of the human heart, had helped form an inflexible, cold, positive, even vivacious character, but one quite devoid of imagination. Such natures produce an amazing effect on souls which are imagination entirely. Mina was astounded that a Frenchman could be so simple.

That evening, when he had taken his leave, Mina felt as though she had been separated from a friend who had known all her secrets for many years. Everything struck her as dry and tiresome, even the tender friendship of Madame de Cély. Mina had felt no need to disguise any of her thoughts in the presence of her new friend; the fear of French irony had not compelled her, at every moment, to draw a veil over notions so replete with German frankness. Monsieur de Larçay dispensed with a host of little phrases and gestures required by elegance. This aged him by some eight or ten years, but by the same token he occupied all Mina's thoughts for the first hour which followed his departure.

The following day, it was a strain for her to attend even to Madame de Cély; everything seemed dry and cynical. She no longer regarded as a chimera to be forgotten her secret hope of finding a frank and sincere heart which did not inveterately seek motives for derision in the simplest remark; she was pensive all day long. That evening, Madame de Cély happened to mention Monsieur de Larçay; Mina shuddered and stood up as if she had been called, blushed deeply, and found it difficult to explain her singular impulse. In her disturbance, she could not long disguise from herself what it was crucial to conceal from others. She took refuge in her bedroom. "I am a madwoman," she told herself. At that moment her misery began: it made giant strides; in no time she had reached the stage of remorse. "I am in love, and in love with a married man!" Such was the reproach which agitated her all night long.

Monsieur de Larçay, leaving with his wife to take the waters at Aix-en-Savoie, had forgotten a map on which he had shown the ladies a little detour he was intending to make on his way to that city. One of Madame de Cély's children found this map; Mina snatched it away and escaped into the gardens. Here she spent an hour following the journey planned by Monsieur de Larçay. The names of the villages he would pass through seemed to her noble and singular. She conceived the most picturesque images of their position; she envied the happiness of their inhabitants. This sweet folly was so powerful that it managed to ward off her remorse. A few days later, someone remarked in Madame de Cély's salon that the Larçays had left for Savoie. This news produced a revolution in Mina's mind; she experienced an intense desire to travel.

A fortnight later, a German lady of a certain age arrived at Aix-en-Savoie in a carriage rented at Geneva. This lady

had a chambermaid with whom she seemed so out of temper that Madame Toinod, mistress of the little inn where she had stopped, was scandalized. Madame Cramer, which was the German lady's name, sent for the innkeeper.

"I wish to take into my employ," she announced, "a local girl who knows the *persons* of the city of Aix and its environs; I shall have nothing further to do with this fine young lady whom I was so foolish as to bring with me, and who knows no one here."

"Heavens! Your mistress seems quite out of sorts with you!" Madame Toinod remarked to the chambermaid, as soon as they were alone together.

"Don't mention her to me," said Aniken, tears in her eyes. "What was the reason for making me leave Frankfort, where my parents keep a fine shop? My mother employs the best tailors in town and works from the latest Paris models."

"Your mistress told me she would give you three hundred francs whenever you like, if you would return to Frankfort."

"I would not be received kindly—my mother will never believe that Madame Cramer dismissed me for no good reasons."

"Well, why not stay in Aix? I shall undertake to find you a place. I keep a sort of employment office here; I am the one who furnishes servants to people who come for the waters. It will cost you some sixty francs for your expenses, and out of Madame Cramer's three hundred francs, you will still have a good ten louis d'or in hand."

"There will be a hundred francs for you, instead of those sixty," said Aniken, "if you find me a place with a French family: I want to learn French properly and go to work in Paris. I know how to sew very well, and as a pledge of my intentions, I shall leave with my employers twenty louis d'or which I have brought from Frankfort."

Chance favoured the romantic incident which had already cost Mademoiselle de Vanghel two or three hundred louis. Monsieur and Madame de Larçay reached the Croix-de-Savoie: this is the fashionable hotel. Madame de Larçay found that it was far too noisy, and took lodgings in a charming house at the lake's edge. The spa was quite gay that year; there was a great press of wealthy people, frequent fine balls at which people dressed quite as in Paris, and each evening a great party at the Redoute. Madame de Larçay, dissatisfied with the clumsy maidservants of Aix, wanted the services of a girl who was willing to work. She was advised to call at Madame Toinod's, and there she wasted no time over the local girls, clearly all too inexperienced. At last Aniken was proposed, whose hundred francs had doubled Madame Toinod's natural skill. The young German girl's serious expression delighted Madame de Larçay; she engaged her on the spot and sent for her trunk.

That same evening, after her employers had set off for the Redoute, Aniken dreamily strolled about in the garden on the lake. "At last," she mused, "my great folly is achieved! What will become of me if I am recognized? What would Madame de Cély say, who thinks I have gone back to Königsberg!" The courage which had sustained Mina as long as action had been required was beginning to abandon her. Her soul was suddenly stirred, her breath came fast. Remorse and the fear of being shamed made her deeply unhappy. But then the moon rose behind the mountain of Haute-Combe; its gleaming orb was reflected in the waters of the lake gently stirred by a northern breeze; great white clouds of curious shape rapidly passed across the moon and seemed to Mina like giants. "They come from my country," she told herself. "They want to see me and give me courage, in the singular part I have decided to play." Her attentive

and impassioned gaze followed their swift movements. "Shadows of my ancestors," she breathed to herself, "recognize your own; like you, I have courage. Be not alarmed by the strange costume in which you see me; I shall be loyal to honour. That secret flame of honour and heroism you have transmitted to me finds nothing worthy of itself in the prosaic age where fate has flung me. Will you scorn me because I have given myself a destiny in accord with the fire that burns within?" Mina was no longer unhappy.

A sweet song was audible in the distance; the voice apparently came from the other side of the lake. The fading sounds barely reached Mina's ears, though she was listening closely. Her ideas changed their course, and she fell to pitying her lot. "What does it matter what I try to do? The most I shall achieve is to convince myself that this pure and heavenly soul I had dreamed of really does exist in this world! Even so, it will remain invisible for me. Did I ever speak in the presence of my chambermaid? This wretched disguise will merely expose me to the society of Alfred's servants. He will never deign to speak to me." She wept bitterly. "I shall see him, at least, every day," she suddenly realized, and her courage began to return. ". . . A greater happiness than that was not intended for me . . . My poor mother was right: 'what follies you will commit some day,' she told me, 'if you should ever fall in love!'"

The voice singing across the lake was heard again, but much closer now. Mina realized that it emanated from a boat which she perceived by the movement it communicated to the moon-silvered waves. She distinguished a sweet melody worthy of Mozart. After a quarter of an hour, she forgot all the reproaches she had made to herself, and mused only on the happiness of seeing Alfred every day. "Must not each being," she asked herself at last, "fulfill his fate? Despite

the happy accidents of birth and fortune, it happens that mine is not to shine at some court, or at some ball. I used to attract all eyes, I have seen myself admired—and my tedium, amidst that crowd, turned to the blackest melancholy! Everyone was so eager to speak to me; but I was mortally bored. Since the death of my parents, my only moments of happiness have been those when, without tiresome neighbors, I could listen to Mozart's music. Is it my fault if the search for happiness, natural to all men, leads me to this strange enterprise? Probably it will be to my shame: well, the convents of the Catholic Church will offer me a refuge."

Midnight was chiming in the village steeple on the other side of the lake. This solemn hour made Mina tremble; the moon was no longer high in the sky; Mina went indoors. It was as she leaned on the balustrade of the gallery overhanging the lake and the little garden that Mina, under the vulgar name of Aniken, was awaiting *her master and mistress*. The music had restored her courage. "My ancestors," she told herself, "left their splendid castle in Königsberg in order to go to the Holy Land; a few years later they returned to it, through a thousand dangers, disguised like myself. The courage which animated them flings me into the only dangers which remain within reach of my sex in this childish, tedious, and vulgar age. May I emerge from them with honour, whereupon all generous hearts will perhaps be astonished by my folly, but in secret they will forgive me."

The days passed rapidly and soon found Mina reconciled to her lot. She was obliged to do a good deal of sewing; gaily she assumed the duties of her new condition. Frequently she seemed to be performing in a play: she joked with herself when she inadvertently yielded to some impulse

alien to her role. One day, at the hour of the after-dinner promenade, when a lackey opened the barouche and unfolded the running board, she quickly stepped out first.

"The girl is mad," said Madame de Larçay.

Alfred stared at her closely; he found her quite graceful. Mina was not at all disturbed by notions of *duty* nor by fear of ridicule. Such concepts of *human prudence* were quite beneath her; all the objections she offered herself proceeded only from the danger of inspiring Madame de Larçay with certain suspicions. It had been but six weeks since she had spent a whole day with this lady, and in a very different role.

Every day, Mina got up very early in order to be able to indulge for two hours in the tasks of making herself ugly. Her fine blond hair, which she had so often been told it was impossible to forget, had been done away with by a few snips of the scissors; thanks to a chemical preparation, her remaining locks had assumed a disagreeable and mingled tint, tending toward a dark chestnut. A mild decoction of ivy leaves applied each morning to her delicate hands gave them the appearance of a coarse skin. Each morning, too, that fresh complexion took on some of the unpleasant shades the White Men bring back from the colonies when their blood has had some intimacy with the Negro race. Content with her disguise, which made her in fact excessively plain, Mina hoped to avoid having ideas of too remarkable a sort. Absorbed in her happiness, she had no desire to speak. Placed near a window in Madame de Larçay's bedroom and busy arranging gowns for the evening, twenty times a day she would hear Alfred speaking and found new occasions to admire his character. Shall we dare say it? . . . Why not, since we are portraying a German heart. There were moments of felicity and of exaltation

when Mina reached the point of imagining that he was a supernatural being. The sincere zeal with which she performed her new functions had its natural effect on Madame de Larçay, who was a mediocre soul: she treated Mina with hauteur, and as a poor girl who was only too happy to be granted employment.

"Everything which is sincere and truly alive will be forever out of place among such people," Mina told herself. She let it be understood that she hoped to return to Madame Cramer's good graces. Almost every day she asked for permission to visit her.

Mina had feared that her behavior might give Madame de Larçay some strange ideas; she was delighted to realize that her new mistress saw her as nothing but a girl less skillful with her needle than the chambermaid she had left behind in Paris. Monsieur Dubois, Alfred's valet, was more troublesome. He was a Parisian of some forty years and a well-groomed appearance, who believed it was one of his duties to court his new colleague. Aniken encouraged him to talk and realized that fortunately his only true passion was to accumulate a fortune large enough to enable him to open a café in Paris. Then, without embarrassment, she began giving him presents. Soon Dubois served her with as much respect as he showed Madame de Larçay herself.

Alfred noticed that this young German girl, so clumsy and timid at times, had manners quite out of keeping with her position, and ideas of a delicacy and finesse which made her worth listening to. Mina, seeing in his eyes that he was listening to her words, allowed herself certain delicate and penetrating reflections, especially when she hoped not to be overheard or at least understood by Madame de Larçay.

If, during the first two months Mademoiselle de Vanghel spent at Aix, a philosopher had asked her what her purpose

was, the childishness of the answer would have amazed him, and the philosopher would have suspected a certain amount of hypocrisy. Continually to see and hear the man she was head over heels in love with was the sole purpose of her life: she desired nothing else, she was too happy to think of the future. If the philosopher had told her that such love might cease being so pure, he would have angered more than surprised her. Mina was studying with delight the character of the man she adored. It was especially in contrast with the high society in which fortune and the position of his father, a member of the Upper Chamber, had placed him, that the tranquil Larçay's character shone. Had he lived among bourgeois folk, the simplicity of his manners, his horror of affectation and grand airs would have revealed him, in their eyes, as a man of utter mediocrity. Alfred never sought to say witty things. This habit was what, on the first day, had most contributed to awaken Mina's close attention. Seeing the French through her country's prejudices, she found that their conversation always seemed to be the end of a comic song. Alfred had seen enough distinguished people in his life to be able to produce a certain amount of wit from memory; but he would have avoided as something vile uttering merely amusing phrases which he himself had not made up on the spur of the moment, and which one or another of his hearers might have known quite as well as he.

Each evening, Alfred drove his wife to the Redoute and then returned home to indulge his passion for botany which the nature of the place had inspired in him, for it was here that Jean-Jacques Rousseau had spent his youth. Alfred kept his boxes and plants in the salon where Aniken would do her sewing. Each evening, they would find themselves alone together for hours at a time, without, on either side, a word

being spoken. Both were embarrassed and yet happy. Aniken had no other attentions for Alfred beyond that of dissolving a little glue in water so that he could paste dried plants into his herbal, and she permitted herself even this indulgence only because it might pass as part of her duties. When Alfred was not there, Mina admired these lovely plants he brought back from his excursions into the picturesque foothills around the Lac du Bourget. She herself was soon affected by a sincere love of botany. Alfred found this convenient and soon quite singular. "He loves me," Mina said to herself, "but I have just seen what success my enthusiasm for the functions of my condition have enjoyed with Madame de Larçay."

Madame Cramer pretended to fall ill; Mina sought and obtained permission to spend her evenings with her former mistress. Alfred was astonished to find his interest in botany diminishing and virtually disappearing; he remained the whole evening at the Redoute, and his wife teased him about his inability to endure solitude. Alfred admitted to himself that he had developed a liking for the girl. Vexed by the timidity he felt in her presence, he had a moment of fatuity: "Why not behave as one of my friends would? After all, she is only a chambermaid."

One evening, when it was raining, Mina remained in the house. Alfred put in no more than a token appearance at the Redoute. When he returned home, Mina's presence in the salon seemed to surprise him. This little false note, which Mina noticed, deprived her of all the happiness she had promised herself for that evening. It was perhaps to this mood that she owed the veritable indignation with which she repulsed Alfred's advances. She withdrew to her own room. "I have been deceived," she told herself, in tears.

"These Frenchmen are all the same." During the night, she was on the verge of returning to Paris.

The next morning, the scornful expression with which she gazed at Alfred was not simulated. Alfred was stung. He paid no further attention to Mina, and spent all his evenings at the Redoute. Without suspecting it, he had made the right move. This coldness caused the plan of a return to Paris to be forgotten: "I am running no danger at this man's hands," Mina decided, and eight days had not passed before she felt she had forgiven this little revival of the French character. For his part, Alfred realized, from the boredom he experienced among the ladies at the Redoute, that he was more in love than he had imagined. Yet he persisted in his indifferent behaviour. In truth his eyes followed Mina with pleasure, and he would occasionally speak to her, but no longer returned to his lodgings in the evenings. Mina was wretched; almost without realizing it, she ceased to undertake, every morning, the toilette intended to make herself homely. "Am I dreaming?" Alfred wondered. "Aniken is becoming one of the loveliest creatures I have ever seen." One evening when he had returned home by the merest chance, he was led on by his feelings, and asked Aniken's forgiveness for having treated her so frivolously.

"I realized," he told her, "that you were inspiring in me an interest I had never felt for anyone; I was alarmed, I sought to cure myself or to break off with you, and ever since I have been the most unhappy man on earth."

"Ah! how happy you have made me, Alfred!" exclaimed Mina, in ecstasy.

They spent this evening and those that followed in admitting that they loved each other madly, and promising to be chaste forever.

Alfred's discreet character was hardly given to the cultivation of illusions. He knew that lovers discover singular perfections in those they love. The treasures of wit and delicacy he was discovering in Mina convinced him that he was truly in love. "Is it possible that this is a mere illusion?" he asked himself every day, and he compared what Mina had said to him the evening before to what the women of the society he found at the Redoute were saying. For her part, Mina felt that she had been on the point of losing Alfred. What would have become of her, had he continued to spend his evenings at the Redoute? Far from attempting to play the part of an ordinary chambermaid any longer, she had never in her life made such efforts to please. "Should I tell Alfred who I am?" she wondered. "His eminently prudent mind will certainly reprove such a folly, even if it has been undertaken for his sake. Moreover," she went on, "my fate must be decided here. If I mention Mademoiselle de Vanghel, whose estates are some leagues from his own, he will be sure to meet me again in Paris. No, on the contrary, the prospect of never seeing me again must determine him to take the strange steps which are, alas! essential to our happiness. How will this discreet man persuade himself to change his religion, divorce his wife, and come and live as my husband on my splendid estates in eastern Prussia?" That great word *illegitimate* did not occur to Mina as an insurmountable barrier to her new projects; she imagined she was not departing from the path of virtue, because she would not have hesitated to sacrifice her life a thousand times over in order to serve Alfred.

Gradually Madame de Larçay became explicitly jealous of Aniken. The singular transformation of the girl's countenance had not eluded her; she attributed it to extreme coquetry. Madame de Larçay might have dismissed the

creature straightway, but her friends pointed out that she must not give such importance to a whim: what must be avoided was Monsieur de Larçay's bringing Aniken to Paris.

"Be discreet," she was told, "and your distress will come to an end with the season here at the spa."

Madame de Larçay had Madame Cramer watched, and tried to convince her husband that Aniken was merely an adventuress who, pursued by justice in Vienna or Berlin for some action reprehensible in the eyes of the law, had gone into hiding here in Aix, and was probably awaiting the arrival of some commercial profiteer, her associate. This notion, presented as a likely conjecture though one not important enough to investigate, cast a shadow over Alfred's mood. It was obvious to him that Aniken was not a chambermaid; but what serious interest could have forced upon her the wretched part she was playing? It could only be fear.

Mina readily guessed the cause of the disturbance she saw in Alfred's gaze. One evening, she was imprudent enough to question him; he acknowledged how matters stood, Mina was confused, and speechless. Alfred was so close to the truth that at first she had a great deal of difficulty defending herself. The false Madame Cramer, faithless to her role, had suggested that financial interests mattered little to her. In her despair over the effect she saw Madame Cramer's remarks producing on Alfred's soul, she was on the point of telling him who she was. Apparently the man who loved Aniken to madness would also love Mademoiselle de Vanghel; but Alfred would be sure to see her again in Paris, where she could not obtain the sacrifices necessary to her love!

It was in these mortal uncertainties that Mina spent the day. It was the evening which would be difficult to get through. Would she have the courage, alone again with Alfred, to resist the melancholy she read in his eyes, to allow

an only too natural suspicion to weaken or even destroy his love for her? That evening, Alfred drove his wife to the Redoute and did not return. There was a masked ball that evening, a great deal of noise, and a great crowd. The streets of Aix were crowded with carriages belonging to curiosity-seekers from as far away as Chambéry and even Geneva. All this ostentation of public merriment redoubled Mina's melancholy. She could not remain in that salon where, for several hours, she had vainly awaited this too-beloved man who did not come. She sought refuge with her companion. Here, too, she found misfortune; this woman coldly asked her permission to leave her, adding that though poor indeed, she could no longer bring herself to take the scarcely honourable role in which she had been placed. Far from having a character appropriate to prudent decisions, in extreme situations Mina required only a word in order to represent to herself an entire situation of life under a new aspect. "Indeed," she observed, struck by her companion's observation, "my disguise is no such thing for anyone, and I have lost honour. No doubt I pass for an adventuress. Since I have surrendered everything for Alfred," she soon added, "I am mad to deprive myself of the happiness of seeing him. At least at the ball I can watch him to my heart's content, and study his soul."

She ordered masks and dominoes; she had brought from Paris some diamonds which she put on, either to disguise herself more completely in Alfred's eyes or to distinguish herself from the host of masks and perhaps persuade him to speak to her. Mina appeared at the Redoute on her companion's arm, intriguing everyone by her silence. At last she saw Alfred, who seemed to her extremely sad. Mina never took her eyes from him and was happy, when a voice murmured in her ear:

"Love recognizes Mademoiselle de Vanghel's disguise."

She trembled and turned around: it was Count de Ruppert. She could not have made a more disastrous encounter at this time.

"I recognized your diamonds, those are Berlin settings," he said to her. "I've just come from Toeplitz, from Spa, from Baden: I've hunted for you in every watering-place in Europe."

"If you say one more word," Mina told him, "I shall never see you again. Tomorrow night, at seven, be opposite the house at number 17, Rue de Chambéry."

"How am I to keep Monsieur de Ruppert from disclosing my secret to his intimate friend Larçay?" This was the great problem which plunged Mina into the most painful agitation all night long. Several times, in her despair, she was on the point of ordering her horses and leaving on the spot. "But for the rest of his life Alfred will believe that this Aniken he so loved was only some unworthy person fleeing in disguise the consequences of her wicked actions. Moreover if I escape without seeing Monsieur de Ruppert, despite his respect for my fortune, he is quite capable of divulging my secret. But if I stay, how can I ward off Monsieur de Ruppert's suspicions? What scheme to devise?"

At the same masked ball where Mina had made so unfortunate an encounter, all those mindless gentlemen, taking the waters to divert their boredom, surrounded Madame de Larçay as was their custom. Hesitating over what sorts of things to say this evening, since the commonplaces suitable to a salon are no longer appropriate for a masked ball, they alluded to the beauty of her German chambermaid. There was even, among them, one fool bolder than the rest who indulged himself in several indelicate observations concerning the jealousy they attributed to Madame de Larçay. One

absolutely coarse masker challenged her to take revenge on her husband by accepting a lover; this remark produced an explosion in the mind of a highly prudent woman accustomed to the halo of flatteries with which a high position and a great fortune had surrounded her life.

The day after the ball, there was a promenade along the lake. Mina was free to visit Madame Cramer, where she received Monsieur de Ruppert. He had not yet recovered from his astonishment.

"Great misfortunes which have altered my position," Mina told him, "have led me to grant your love some justice. Would you be willing to marry a widow?"

"Then you were secretly married!" said the count, turning pale.

"How could you have failed to guess?" Mina answered, "when you found me refusing you—you and some of the greatest matches in France?"

"A singular character—but admirable!" the count exclaimed, trying to conceal his stupefaction.

"I am united to a man unworthy of me," Mademoiselle de Vanghel continued, "but I am a Protestant, and my religion, which I should be happy to see you adopt, permits me to divorce. Yet do not suppose that at this moment I can feel love for anyone, even for a man who would inspire me with the greatest esteem and confidence: I can offer you only friendship. I long to remain in France; who can forget this country, once one has known such a sojourn? I need a protector. You have a great name, a splendid intellect, everything which affords a fine position in the world. A great fortune can make your mansion the first in Paris. Will you obey me like a child? At this price, but at this price alone, I shall offer you my hand in a year."

During this long speech, Count de Ruppert was calculat-

ing the effects of an adventure disagreeable to sustain, but nonetheless compensated with a great fortune, and after all with a really fine woman. It was quite gracefully that he pledged obedience. He attempted every form of speech in order to penetrate her secrets.

"Your efforts will be futile," she answered with a laugh. "Will you have the courage of a lion and the docility of a child?"

"I am your slave," the count replied.

"I live hidden in the vicinity of Aix, but I know all that is happening here. In eight or nine days, watch the lake at the moment when midnight chimes in the parish steeple: you will see a flare floating on the waves. The next day, at nine in the evening, I shall be here, and I permit you to come. Speak my name, utter a word to anyone, and you will never see me again in your life."

After the promenade along the lake, during which, and more than once, some mention had been made of Aniken's beauty, Madame de Larçay returned to her residence in a state of irritation quite alien to her dignified and temperate character. She began with a few extremely harsh words to Mina which pierced the girl's heart, for they were spoken in Alfred's presence and he did not come to her defense. She replied, for the first time, in a sharp manner. Madame de Larçay believed she perceived in this tone the assurance of a young woman who is led by the love she inspires to forget herself, and her anger knew no bounds. She accused Mina of making assignations with certain persons at Madame Cramer's, who despite the fiction of an apparent quarrel, was only too evidently in league with her.

"Has that monster de Ruppert already betrayed me?" Mina wondered.

Alfred stared at her fixedly, as though to discover the

truth. The lack of delicacy in his gaze gave her the courage of despair: she coldly denied the calumny with which she was charged and added not another word. Madame de Larçay dismissed her on the spot. At two in the morning, Mina asked the faithful Dubois to accompany her to Madame Cramer's. Locking herself in her room, Mina shed tears of rage, thinking how few were the means of vengeance left to her by the strange position she had taken. "Ah, would it not be better to abandon everything and return to Paris? What I have undertaken is beyond my powers! But Alfred will have no other memory of me than scorn: all his life Alfred will despise me," she added, dissolving in tears. She realized that with this cruel notion which would not leave her, she would be even more wretched in Paris than in Aix. "Madame de Larçay slanders me; God knows what is said of me at the Redoute! And these observations, made by everyone and his brother, will utterly ruin me in Alfred's mind. How would a Frenchman manage not to think what *everyone* thinks? He was quite capable of hearing such things uttered, in my very presence, without contradicting them, without addressing a single remark to me in consolation! But then—do I still love him? Are not the dreadful impulses tormenting me now the last agonies of this unfortunate love? It is vile not to seek revenge!" Such was Mina's last thought.

As soon as it was daylight, she sent for Monsieur de Ruppert. As she waited for him, she walked back and forth, in great agitation, in the garden. Gradually a splendid summer sun rose and illuminated the smiling hills around the lake. This joyous nature but redoubled Mina's fury. At last Monsieur de Ruppert appeared. "What an idiot!" Mina thought to herself as she saw him approach. "And now I must let him speak for an hour, at least."

She received Monsieur de Ruppert in the salon, and her lustreless eyes counted the minutes by the clock. The count was enchanted; for the first time this little foreign creature listened to him with the attention his sentiments deserved.

"At least you are convinced of my feelings?" he was saying to Mina as the minute hand reached the numeral which completed her hour of patience.

"Avenge me."

"What must I do?"

"Seduce Madame de Larçay, and make sure her husband is well aware that she is deceiving him, so that there can be no doubt in his mind. Then he will repay her for the miseries with which this woman's calumnies have poisoned my life."

"Yours is a dreadful plan," said the count.

"You mean it is difficult to execute," Mina answered with an ironic smile.

"Not difficult—no, not for me," replied the count, stung. "I shall destroy this woman's reputation," he added with a frivolous expression. "A pity, she was a fine figure of a woman."

"Take care, Monsieur, I have no intention of compelling you to please Madame de Larçay to any real extent. I merely desire that her husband have no doubt that you please her."

The count took his leave; Mina was less wretched. To take revenge is to act, and to act is to hope. "If Alfred dies," she said to herself, "I shall die!" And she smiled. The happiness she felt at this moment separated her from virtue forever. The ordeal of that night had been too great for her character; she was not prepared to find herself slandered in Alfred's presence, and to see him put faith in the slander. Henceforth she might still utter the word virtue, but she would be deluding herself; her heart was entirely filled by vengeance and by love.

Mina formed the whole plan of her revenge in her mind; could it be executed? This was the only doubt which offered itself to her. She had no other means of action than the devotion of a fool and a great deal of money.

Monsieur de Larçay appeared. "What are you doing here?" Mina asked haughtily.

"I am an unhappy man, and I have come to weep with the best friend I have in the world."

"What! And your first word is not that you reject the slander pronounced against me! Leave!"

"It is to answer false imputations," Alfred replied with dignity, "to tell you as I do that I can conceive of no happiness without you. Aniken, don't be angry," he added, with tears in his eyes. "Find a reasonable means of uniting us and I am ready to do anything. Command me, but rescue me from the abyss into which chance has flung me; myself, I see no way . . ."

"Your presence here makes all of Madame de Larçay's slanders true; leave me, and do not attempt to see me again."

Alfred withdrew more in anger than in pain.

"He finds nothing to say to me," Mina mused; she was in despair; she was virtually obliged to despise the man whom she adored. "What! he could find no means of being with her! And he was a man, a soldier! She, a mere girl, had found, since she had loved him, a means, and a terrible means, the disguise which would dishonour her forever, if it were divined! . . . But Alfred had said: '*Command me, find a reasonable means . . .*'" There must have been a little remorse left in Mina's soul, for these words comforted her: then she had the power to take action. "Yet," the devil's advocate resumed, "yet Alfred said nothing like 'I don't believe the slander.' And indeed, though my folly may well

have exaggerated the difference between the manners of France and of Germany, I don't really resemble a chambermaid. In that case, why does a girl my age come disguised to a watering-place? As he is . . . I can no longer be happy with anyone else. 'Find a way to unite us,' he said, 'I am ready to do anything.' He is weak, and assigns me the burden of our happiness. I shall assume that burden," Mina determined, as she stood up and strode in agitation round the salon. "Let us see first if his passion can resist absence, or if he is a man to be despised on every point, a true child of irony. Then Mina de Vanghel will manage to forget him."

An hour later, she left for Chambéry, which is only a few leagues from Aix.

Alfred, though not much inclined to religion, found that it was in poor taste to have none. Upon arriving in Chambéry, Madame Cramer engaged a young Genevan, studying to be a Protestant minister, to come every evening and explicate the Bible to her and to Aniken, whom she henceforth, out of friendship and in order to be forgiven for her former anger, called her niece. Madame Cramer took lodgings at the best inn, and nothing was easier to explain than her behaviour. Believing she was ill, she had summoned the finest physicians in the town, whom she paid extremely well. Mina consulted them on occasion with regard to an affection of the skin which occasionally dimmed her complexion and gave her the colouring of a quadroon.

The companion began to be much less scandalized by the name of Cramer she had promised to assume and by all of Mademoiselle de Vanghel's behaviour; she quite simply believed her to be mad. Mina had hired Les Charmettes, a country house in an isolated valley a quarter of an hour from Chambéry, where Jean-Jacques Rousseau declares that

he spent the happiest moments of his life. The writings of this author constituted her only comfort. One day she had a moment of delicious happiness. At the turn of a path, in the little wood of chestnut-trees opposite the modest structure of Les Charmettes, she found Alfred. She had not seen him for fifteen days. He suggested, with a timidity which enchanted Mina, that she leave Madame Cramer's service and accept a small allowance from him. "You would have a chambermaid, instead of being one yourself, and I should never see you except in the presence of such a chaperon." Aniken refused for religious motives. She told him that Madame Cramer was now extremely good to her and seemed to repent of the behaviour she had shown upon arriving in Aix.

"I remember very well," she ended by saying to him, "the slander of which I was the object on Madame de Larçay's part; it has constituted a duty for me to ask you, here and now, not to return to Les Charmettes."

A few days later, she went to Aix; she was very pleased with Monsieur de Ruppert. Madame de Larçay and her new friends were taking advantage of the fine weather to make excursions in the neighbourhood. During a pleasure-party these ladies made to Haute-Combe (an abbey located on the other side of the Lac du Bourget, opposite Aix, and which is the Saint-Denis of the dukes of Savoie), Monsieur de Ruppert, who according to Mina's instructions had not sought out Madame de Larçay's company, was noticed wandering in the woods surrounding Haute-Combe. Madame de Larçay's friends were greatly concerned with this act of timidity in a man known for his boldness. It seemed clear to them that he had conceived a grand passion for her. Dubois informed Mina that his master was living in the blackest melancholy.

"He regrets the company he once so enjoyed and," Dubois

added, "he has another reason for disappointment. Who would have thought it of so prudent a gentleman? Monsieur the Count de Ruppert is causing him jealousy!"

This jealousy amused Monsieur de Ruppert. "Will you allow me," he asked Mademoiselle de Vanghel, "to have this poor Larçay intercept an impassioned letter I shall write to his wife? Nothing will be so amusing as her denials, if he insists on speaking to her about it."

"All in good time," Mina replied. "But above all," she continued in a harsh tone of voice, "be careful to have nothing to do with Monsieur de Larçay—no duel; if he should die, I shall never be yours."

She immediately regretted the severe tone of voice in which she had spoken these words, and applied herself to being forgiven for them. She realized that Monsieur de Ruppert had not perceived the harshness of the remark that had escaped her, and her disdain for him was increased. Monsieur de Ruppert told her that perhaps Madame de Larçay might not have been altogether insensible to his attentions; but to entertain himself, while paying her the most assiduous court, he had been very careful, whenever he had occasion to speak to her in private, to utter only the most indifferent remarks and to make the most neutral observations.

Mina was pleased with this conduct. It was in this character, which with some appearances of reason was in fact its contrary, that she only half despised him. She boldly consulted Monsieur de Ruppert as to a considerable investment she wished to make, with regard to her French income, and showed him letters from her financial adviser in Königsberg and her banker in Paris. She noticed that the sight of these letters kept him from making a remark which she did not wish to hear: on her interest in Monsieur de Larçay.

"What a difference!" she mused while Monsieur de Rup-

pert gave her long descriptions of how she might best invest her money. "And there are people who consider the count to have more wit and more sensibility than Alfred! O nation of coarse souls! O nation of playactors! How the tender bonhomie of my good Germans would please me now, were it not for the sad necessity of appearing at a court and of marrying the king's favorite aide-de-camp!"

Dubois came to tell her that Alfred had intercepted a singular letter addressed to Madame de Larçay by the Count de Ruppert; Alfred had shown it to his wife, who had claimed that this letter was nothing but a bad joke. Hearing this account, Mina was no longer able to control her anxiety. Monsieur de Ruppert could play every part except that of an overly patient man. She suggested that he come and spend a week at Chambéry; he showed little eagerness to do so.

"I am engaged in absurd undertakings; I write a letter which can make me the butt of spiteful tongues; at least I do not have to appear to be trying to hide!"

"That is precisely what you must do—you must hide," Mina retorted haughtily. "Are you willing to avenge me or not? I do not want Madame de Larçay to owe the happiness of her widowhood to me."

"You would prefer, I imagine, that her husband be the widower!"

"And what is that to you?" There ensued a lively scene with Monsieur de Ruppert, who left her in a rage; but he apparently reflected on the unlikelihood of a slander being invented on his account—or one from which he would have much to fear. His vanity reminded him that his bravery was widely known. In a single stroke he might repair all the follies of his youth and in a single moment conquer a splendid position in Parisian society; this was worth more than a duel.

The first person whom Mina saw again at Les Charmettes, the day after her return from Aix, was Monsieur de Ruppert. His presence reassured her, but that very evening she was deeply troubled: Monsieur de Larçay had come to see her.

"I am seeking neither an excuse nor a pretext," he said with great simplicity. "I cannot endure a fortnight without seeing you, and yesterday was the fifteenth day . . ."

Mina too had counted the days; never had she felt so strongly drawn toward Alfred, but she trembled at the possibility of his engaging in a duel with Monsieur de Ruppert. She did everything in her power to obtain his confidences on the subject of the intercepted letter. She found him preoccupied, but he said nothing to her about the matter; she could obtain nothing but these words: "I have suffered a deep disappointment," he said at last. "It has nothing to do with ambition, or with money, and the most evident effect of my unfortunate position is to intensify my passionate friendship for you. What casts me into despair is that duty has no empire over my heart. There is nothing for it, I cannot live without you."

"And I shall never live without you," she said, taking his hand and covering it with kisses, and at the same time preventing him from putting his arms around her. "Try to safeguard your life, for I shall not survive you by one hour."

"Ah, you know all!" Alfred replied, and with evident pain he managed to say nothing more.

The day after his return to Aix, a second anonymous letter informed Monsieur de Larçay that during his last expedition in the mountains (this was the occasion he had taken to visit Chambéry), his wife had received Monsieur de Ruppert at home. The anonymous correspondent concluded thus: "Tonight, around midnight, Monsieur de R—— is to be received. I am only too aware that I cannot inspire you with

confidence of any sort; therefore do not behave foolishly. Do not indulge your anger, if anger is what you feel, until you have seen for yourself. If I am mistaken, and if I am deceiving you, you will have endured no more than a night spent in some hiding-place near Madame de Larçay."

Alfred was deeply disturbed by this letter. A moment later, he received a note from Aniken: "We have arrived in Aix; Madame Cramer has just gone to her room. I am free; come."

Monsieur de Larçay decided that before concealing himself in the garden of his own house, he had time to spend ten minutes with Aniken. He arrived at her lodgings extremely troubled. This night, which had already begun, would be as decisive for Mina as for him; but she was calm. To all the objections her reason made, she had the same answer: death.

"You are silent," Mina said to him, "but it is clear that something extraordinary is happening to you. You were not to give me the pain of seeing you. But since you have come after all, I want to remain with you the whole evening." Contrary to Mina's expectation, Alfred consented to remain without raising any difficulty. In decisive circumstances, a powerful mind radiates a kind of magnanimity which is happiness.

"I am going to engage in the foolish role of the jealous husband," Alfred said to her at last. "I am going to hide myself in my own garden; this is, I believe, the least painful way of dispelling the wretchedness into which an anonymous letter has just plunged me." And he showed it to her.

"What right have you," Mina asked him, "to dishonour Madame de Larçay? Are you not in a condition of evident separation? You abandon her and renounce the privilege of

keeping her soul occupied: you leave her quite barbarously to the tedium natural to a woman of thirty, rich and without occupation of any kind: has she not the right to beguile her tedium? And it is you who tell me you love me, you who are more of a criminal than she, for before she did so, you violated your conjugal bond, and now you are a madman: it is you who seek to condemn her to an eternal ennui!"

This way of thinking was too lofty for Alfred; but the tone of Mina's voice gave him a certain strength. He admired the power she had over him, he was spellbound by it. "So long as you deign to keep me with you," he said to her at last, "I shall not know that tedium of which you speak."

At midnight, all had long since become tranquil on the shores of the lake; a cat's paws would have been audible. Mina had followed Alfred behind one of those hedgerows still used to border the gardens of Savoie. All of a sudden a man leaped down from a wall into the garden. Alfred made as if to run toward him; Mina seized him and held him back. "What will you learn if you kill him?" she whispered. "And suppose it were only a thief, or the lover of some woman other than your wife, how terrible your regret to have killed him!"

Alfred had recognized the count; he was in a transport of rage. Mina had the greatest difficulty in restraining him. The count took a ladder hidden at the base of a wall, leaned it against a wooden gallery which ran along the upper floor eight or ten feet above ground. One of the windows of Madame de Larçay's bedroom gave onto this gallery. Monsieur de Ruppert entered the apartment by a window of the salon. Alfred rushed to a little door on the ground floor that opened onto the garden; Mina followed him. For a few

seconds she delayed the moment when he could seize a tinderbox and light a candle. She even managed to take his pistols from him.

"Would you awaken everyone living on all the other floors of this house? That would be a fine piece of tittle-tattle for tomorrow morning! Even at the moment of a vengeance I regard as an absurdity, would it not be better that an idle and wicked audience not learn of the offence at the same time as the vengeance?"

Alfred advanced as far as the door of his wife's room. Mina followed him still: "A fine thing, if in my very presence you had the courage to abuse your wife!"

Having reached the door, Alfred flung it open. He saw Monsieur de Ruppert escaping in his nightshirt behind Madame de Larçay's bed, she being at the other end of the room. Monsieur de Ruppert was six feet ahead of her; he had time to open the window and leap out onto the wooden gallery, and from the gallery down into the garden. Monsieur de Larçay followed rapidly; but at the moment he reached the retaining wall which separated the garden from the lake, the boat in which Monsieur de Ruppert was escaping was already five or six yards from shore.

"Till tomorrow, Monsieur de Ruppert!" shouted Monsieur de Larçay. There was no reply. Monsieur de Larçay ran back up the stairs to his wife's room. He found Mina prowling back and forth in the little salon in front of the bedroom. She stopped him as he passed. "What do you suppose you are going to do now? Murder Madame de Larçay? With what right? I shall not endure it. If you do not give me your dagger, I shall raise my voice and warn her to escape. It is true that my own presence here compromises me cruelly in the eyes of your people."

Mina saw that her words were having an effect. "You

love me, yet you are willing to dishonour me!" she added vehemently.

Monsieur de Larçay flung his dagger at her feet and furiously rushed into his wife's bedroom. The scene was an intense one. Madame de Larçay, utterly innocent, supposed she had been visited by a thief; she had neither seen nor heard Monsieur de Ruppert. "You must be mad," she finally hissed at her husband, "and would to God you were only a madman! You apparently desire a separation. You shall have one. At least be discreet enough to say nothing. Tomorrow I shall return to Paris; I shall let it be known that you are travelling in Italy, where I had no desire to follow you."

"When do you plan to fight the duel tomorrow morning?" Mademoiselle de Vanghel asked, when she saw Alfred again.

"What are you saying?" Monsieur de Larçay replied.

"It is no use trying to deceive me. I insist that before you seek out Monsieur de Ruppert, you give me your hand to help me into a boat; I want to go for a row on the lake. If you are fool enough to let yourself be killed, the waters of the lake will put an end to my miseries."

"Now Aniken dear, make me happy tonight. Tomorrow, perhaps, this heart which, since I have known you, has throbbled only for you, as well as this charming hand which I am pressing to my bosom, will belong to corpses lit by tapers and guarded in some church corner by two Savoyard priests. This splendid day is the supreme moment of our lives—let it be the happiest as well."

Mina had the greatest of difficulties resisting Alfred's transports. "I shall be yours," she said at last, "but only if you live. At this moment, such a sacrifice would be too great; I prefer you as you are."

This day was the finest of Mina's life. Probably the pros-

pect of death and the generosity of the sacrifice she was making erased the last impulses of remorse.

The next day, long before sunrise, Alfred came to give her his hand, and helped her into a pretty promenade boat.

"Can you imagine a happiness greater than ours?" she said to Alfred as they headed for the lake.

"From this moment you belong to me, you are my wife," Alfred said. "And I promise to live and to come down to the shore to call to the boat out there. I shall stand here beside this cross."

Six o'clock was chiming at the moment when Mina was going to tell him who she was. She did not want her boat to proceed any distance from the shore, and the boatmen began fishing, which released her from their stares and consequently delighted her. On the stroke of eight, she saw Alfred running down to the shore. He was extremely pale. Mina had herself put on shore.

"He is wounded, perhaps dangerously," Alfred said to her.

"Take this boat, my friend. This accident will put you at the mercy of the authorities here; vanish for two days. Go to Lyons; I shall keep you informed of what is happening."

Alfred hesitated.

"Just think of what these people who are taking the waters here with your wife will say."

This observation made up Monsieur de Larçay's mind; he got in the boat.

The following day, Monsieur de Ruppert was out of danger; but he might have to remain in bed a month or even two. Mina saw him during the night, and was a model of grace and devotion.

"Are you not my *intended*?" she asked, with a falseness entirely natural. She persuaded him to accept a considerable

draft upon her banker in Frankfort. "I must go to Lausanne," Mina told him. "Before our marriage, I want to see you buy back your magnificent family mansion which your follies have forced you to sell. For this, I must dispose of a large estate I own near Custring. Once you can walk, proceed with the sale of this estate; I shall send you power of attorney from Lausanne. Agree if you must to a lowering of the price of this estate, or discount the bills of exchange which you will receive for it. In any case, obtain ready money at all costs. If I marry you, it is only suitable that you should appear, upon signing the marriage contract, to be as rich as I."

The count did not have the slightest suspicion that Mina was treating him as an employee being rewarded with cash.

In Lausanne, Mina had the happiness of receiving in each post a letter from Alfred. Monsieur de Larçay was beginning to understand how much his duel was simplifying his position with regard to Mina and to his wife. "She is not guilty toward you," Mina wrote him: "You abandoned her first, and out of a crowd of agreeable men, perhaps she made an error in choosing Monsieur de Ruppert; but Madame de Larçay's happiness need not be diminished in terms of money." Alfred bestowed upon her an allowance of fifty thousand francs; this was more than half of his income. "What need have I of it?" he wrote to Mina. "I plan not to show myself in Paris for several years, when this absurd adventure will be forgotten."

"That is not at all what I want you to do," Mina wrote back. "You would cause a sensation when you return. Go show yourself in Paris for two weeks while public opinion is still concerned with you. Remember that your wife has done absolutely nothing wrong."

A month later, Monsieur de Larçay rejoined Mina in the

charming village of Belgirate, on Lago Maggiore, a few miles from the Borromean Islands. She was travelling under a false name; she was so deeply in love that she said to Alfred: "Tell Madame Cramer, if you like, that you are engaged to me, that you are my *intended*, as we say in Germany. I shall always receive you with delight, but never outside of Madame Cramer's presence."

Monsieur de Larçay believed that something was lacking in his happiness; but it would be impossible to find a happier period in the life of any man than the month of September Monsieur de Larçay spent with Mina on Lago Maggiore. Mina had found him so discreet that gradually she had abandoned the habit of bringing Madame Cramer along on their excursions.

One day, as they drifted along the lake, Alfred said to her, with a laugh: "Who are you, my sorceress? There is no way I can believe you are Madame Cramer's chambermaid, or even something better than that."

"Well, let's see," Mina replied, "what do you want me to be? An actress who has won a huge prize in a lottery, and who has chosen to spend a few years of her youth in an enchanted world? Or perhaps someone's mistress who after her lover's death has chosen to change character?"

"You might be that, and worse still, yet if tomorrow I were to hear of Madame de Larçay's death, I should ask for your hand in marriage the day after."

Mina flung herself into his arms. "I am Mina de Vanghel, whom you have seen at Madame de Cély's. How can you have failed to recognize me? It must be true that love is blind!" she added, with a laugh.

Whatever happiness Alfred took in being able to value Mina at her true worth, Mina's was still more intimate. Her

delight had been flawed by the necessity of hiding something from her beloved. In love, it is the deceiver who is always unhappy.

Yet Mademoiselle de Vanghel would have done well not to reveal her name to Monsieur de Larçay. At the end of a few months, Mina noticed a certain melancholy in Alfred. They had gone to Naples for the winter, with a passport which named them man and wife. Mina disguised none of her thoughts from her lover, and Mina's intelligence terrified his own. She imagined that he was regretting Paris; she begged him on her knees to spend a month there. He swore he had no such desire, but his melancholy persisted.

"I am placing my life's happiness at great risk," Mina said to him one day, "but your melancholy is more powerful than all my resolutions."

Alfred did not understand what she meant, but nothing equalled his intoxication when, in the afternoon, Mina said to him: "Take me to Torre del Greco."

She supposed she knew the cause of the melancholy she had perceived since becoming his, for he had been made perfectly happy. Intoxicated with love, Mina forgot all her ideals. "Death and a thousand deaths may come tomorrow," she resolved, "they will not be too many to pay for my happiness since the day Alfred fought his duel." She delighted in doing everything Alfred desired. Exalted by this felicity, she did not have the prudence to cast a veil over the extreme notions which constituted the very essence of her character. Her way of seeking happiness must appear not only singular to a commonplace soul, but even shocking. She had hitherto been careful to flatter in Monsieur de Larçay what she called his French prejudices; she needed to account to herself, by the difference in nationality, for what

she was compelled not to admire in him: here Mina felt the disadvantage of the unconventional education her father had bestowed upon her; this education might easily make her appear odious.

In her delight, she was indiscreet enough to think aloud in Alfred's presence. Fortunate the lover who, in this period of love, inspires *pity* in the beloved and not envy! She was so impassioned, in her eyes her lover was so much the type of all that was noble, fine, adorable in the world, that even had she desired to, she would not have had the courage to conceal any of her thoughts from him. To keep from him the deadly plot which had produced the events of the night in Aix was already, and for a long time now, an effort almost beyond her powers.

From the moment her sensual intoxication deprived Mina of the power to withhold utter frankness from Monsieur de Larçay, her rare qualities turned against her. She teased him about that melancholy she discerned in him. The love with which he inspired her soon rose beyond the last stage of madness. "How absurd I am to be distressed!" she decided at last. "It is because I love him more than he loves me. But what nonsense, to torment myself about a thing that always occurs in the intensest forms of happiness to be found on earth! Moreover, I have the misfortune of possessing a more uneasy nature than he, and after all, God is just," she added with a sigh (for remorse came often to trouble her happiness, ever since it had reached its apogee), "I have a great transgression to blame myself for: that night in Aix weighs upon my soul."

Mina grew accustomed to the notion that Alfred was destined by his nature to love less passionately than she. "Were he even less tender, it is still my fate to adore him. I

am happy enough, and lucky enough, that he has no wicked vices. I feel only too intimately that his crimes would cost me nothing, were he to seek my complicity in them."

One day, whatever Mina's illusions may have been, she was struck by the dark anxiety which seemed to be gnawing at Alfred's very soul. For a long time he had been planning to turn over to Madame de Larçay the income from all his property, to become a Protestant, and to marry Mina. On that day, the Prince de S—— was giving a party which was the talk of all Naples, and to which, of course, neither of the lovers was invited; Mina imagined that Alfred was regretting the privileges and the pleasures of a great fortune. She urged him to leave for Königsberg the very next day. Alfred lowered his eyes and made no answer. Finally he raised them and his gaze expressed the most painful suspicions, but not love. Mina was thunderstruck.

"Tell me one thing, Mina. The night I surprised Monsieur de Ruppert in my wife's room, did you have some knowledge of the count's intentions? In a word, were you in complicity with him?"

"Yes," Mina answered resolutely, "Madame de Larçay never had a thought for the count; I believed you belonged to me because I loved you. The two anonymous letters came from me."

"That was a base action," Alfred answered coldly. "The spell is broken. I shall rejoin my wife. I pity you, and I no longer love you, Mina."

There was, in the tone of his voice, a perceptible note of violated self-love. He departed.

"This is what all great souls are exposed to, but they have their resources," she mused, as she walked to the window and watched her lover till he disappeared at the corner of

the street. Once he was out of sight, she went into Alfred's room, and shot herself through the heart with a pistol. Was her life a miscalculation? Her happiness had lasted eight months. Hers was too ardent a spirit to be content with the realities of life.